

## **POLITICAL CULTURE 4 - CHAPTER 8**

### **CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL VIEWS**

#### **PRESENTATION BY PROF CHRISTINE BARBOUR**

(**Abstract:** The great political divide, political culture, are Americans liberal or conservative? Procedural and individual or substantive and collectivist? The three values: Freedom, democracy and equality that unite Americans, the issues that divide Americans.)

**PROF BARBOUR:** What I want to talk to you about today is about what Americans think and believe; how liberal or conservative are they? It is conventional to talk about economies for example on a left right continuum. People define this left right continuum in lots and lots of different ways: more or less government intervention, more or less individual freedom, etc.

The way I've chosen to draw this economic continuum is both in terms of more or less government control of the economy but also in terms of procedural guarantees versus substantive guarantees. On your right, the procedural guarantee side, there is less government control of the economy and more trust in process rather than in government decisions about what the outcome should be. There's more trust in the market to get things right; more sense that if a market or a process makes a decision the decision will be a good one because it came from that process. If you have a free market society and you believe the market makes good decisions then the decision is good because the market made the decision and that's all you need to know about it.

On the other side of this continuum, I would argue that it's more of a trust in substantive outcomes. In other words, "we can't trust these processes to get it right," we need to override the process with political decision making about what the outcome should be whether that outcome is a distribution of wealth, entrance into universities or how much toothpaste ought to be produced. Whatever the outcome is, it's a belief that politicians can make a substantive decision better than a process can; it's more trust in human agency and less in process.

There is also a political continuum with less government control over the social order on one side, with a focus on procedural guarantees. On the other side, more government control over the social order, and substantive guarantees. By "social order," I refer to decisions about how individuals should live their lives. On one end, those decisions are left to individuals, to the democratic process, to procedural guarantees. In effect, we'll guarantee only that everybody gets a chance to make choices; we won't guarantee any outcomes here. We're not going to tell you what your religion is. We're not going to tell you what your behavior should be. We're not going to tell you what your dress should be. Government does not have a role here. It is all process. I can't think of any State that falls here. It's a completely anarchic kind of state. At this extreme you wouldn't even say murder is bad or rape is bad or anything else. You would have no outcomes judged at all.

At the other end of the continuum, you can tell anybody what to do. You can tell people what church to go to, what religious organization to belong to. What their dress should be. What their marriage relationship should be like. At the opposite end, government would have complete control.

With lots of modifications and qualifications you could probably put every nation in the world somewhere on this continuum. I have my students talk about what places go where. In “procedural land” we would locate the western democracies that emerged from the Enlightenment where there is more procedural control over the social order and more procedural control over the economy. So you might find the United States on the left. Perhaps Sweden, which has more substantive control over the economy than the United States but lots of procedural control over the social order, might be closer to the right. On the far right I would put Castro’s Cuba. But where you put these things is debatable. Singapore is a capitalist economy but with strong social control.

The United States is so far on the left of the procedural/substantive continuum that even our frame of reference is totally different. Our political “Left wing” is actually farther to the right than any other European country with a similar capitalist economy, democratic political system and enlightenment heritage. Most Europeans’ “Right wings” could be to the left of our “Left wing.”

While I’m laying out political economic systems on this continuum, what I’m really talking about is worldviews. I’m talking about political cultures; that sort of broad framework of ideas and beliefs about the world. It is hard to explain all this to my students who really have experienced very little political ferment in their lifetimes. So I tell my students this about political culture: a common toy we used to have was a pair of glasses that had pink plastic lenses in them. You put them on and everything you saw was pink. The only thing you couldn’t see with these glasses on was the colour pink because pink on pink - it disappears. In a large sense that’s how political culture is. I tell students you’re looking at the world through your political culture. Everything you see is colored by your political culture. The one thing you can’t really see clearly is your own political culture because you’re in the middle of it and so it’s very hard for you to judge it. It’s very hard for you to see it.

When I talk about political culture I’m talking about the ideas that pull us all together as Americans; ideas that most Americans probably share even if there’s not total consensus on it. I would say that it is both procedural and individualistic. And I would say that it has three core values: democracy, equality and freedom defined in an individualistic and procedural way. For American students it’s especially difficult to understand that there are many ways of defining those three values. In America we tend to define them in individualistic and procedural ways. What do I mean by that?

In terms of individualism, Americans tend to view society as a collection of individuals. We have a hard time with the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We believe that the whole is the sum of its parts. Individuals are a fundamental unit of analysis. We believe when somebody is successful that that individual is then successful. We believe when somebody is not successful that that individual has failed. It is a stretch for Americans to say that there might be collective responsibility for an individual failure. It’s not that we can’t acknowledge social forces that might contribute to an individual’s failure, but for most of us the idea is that individual effort pays off and individuals succeed on the basis of their effort and so we applaud the person who does well and when a person doesn’t do so well we say he should have tried harder. That’s essentially what individualism is.

I would contrast it to a vision of collectivism. Sweden, for example, is so much like the United States. Sweden has an enlightenment background. Sweden has a capitalist economy. Sweden has a democratic government. So I tell them that Swedes are much more collectivist than Americans are. For Sweden their basic unit is society. They believe in collective responsibility. They have an extensive welfare

state, and believe it is society's job to raise individuals up and to let them share. If an individual is successful in Sweden it's because he had the support of society and if an individual failed it is because society might have let them down in some parts. It's a different kind of social network or social support system.

It's not to say that the United States doesn't have a social support system. It does. But it is one much more geared to try and help an individual who has fallen through the cracks than to build a sense of solidarity and social support. Solidarity is a word that doesn't really resonate too much with Americans. They don't think of a network, a brotherhood or a shared sense of social relationships. That's what I mean by individualism.

What do I mean by proceduralism? It means that we really put our trust in procedures to get things right. This goes back to that serious distrust of government that I talked about the other day and I think you had echoed many times for you in things you've heard in the last week or so. Americans really don't trust government to get it right. A substantive decision has to be made by people and people screw up. Both Democrats and Republicans believe this and this is not a partisan thing here. Americans in general tend to be very suspicious of governmental power and consequently they look for processes they can trust instead of trusting political decision making. They don't want a system where government says "We think poverty is wrong" and that "we think people should make much more similar income so we're going to tax the rich really heavily and redistribute that money so that the less well off are raised up" as Swedish Social Democrats will argue.

We don't argue for that kind of outcome because what if the politicians are wrong either in the goal they choose or in their means to getting them. What if they mess up? We would rather say well we might get it wrong so instead let's trust the market, let's trust democracy, let's trust these processes to get things right. We're procedural in that sense. We trust the process rather than trusting the human being. It doesn't mean that we don't think human beings don't get it right some time. I said at lunch, you know, I'd be happy to have a government that made very substantive decisions as long as they're the ones I want it to make. It's when it's making the ones somebody else wants it to make that I start to get nervous. It's that kind of distrust that Americans have about government.

Freedom. You can also see this in the definition of our three core values of freedom, democracy and equality. When Americans talk about freedom they're talking about a negative kind of freedom: freedom from government restraint. Our freedoms that we hold most dear are embodied in the first ten amendments of the constitution and as I told you the other day those are limits on what government can do. They're not powers, they're limits on Congress. We believe in freedom from government.

At this point, my students usually look at me and ask "so what other kind of freedom is there?" and I tell them to think about freedom in Sweden. Sweden has a much more positive vision of freedom. In Sweden it's freedom to do. Here I use the metaphor of a bus trip. Americans would say "you're free to go. The door's open, walk out there and get on that bus." Swedes would say "you're not really free to go till we give you a bus ticket. Here's a bus ticket now you're free to go because you have the means." That's an entirely different vision of what it means to be free in a collective substantive society as opposed to a procedural individualistic society. But Americans believe very strongly and deeply in freedom and it's very important to Americans in general. It doesn't really occur to us most of the time that there are other ways of being free. In fact if you asked an American about a concept of

freedom that involves being given a bus ticket they would say ah that's not free. You had to tax somebody to get that bus ticket. You had to take something away. You had to coerce somebody to get that bus ticket to help that person to be free.

Democracy is a procedural value in America. Americans think of democracy as a way to make a decision. It is also a way of carrying out your civic duty. It is also where you express yourself politically. It's all those things as well but mostly it's a mechanism to make a decision. Fundamentally, we think our decisions are right because they've emerged from that procedure (of democracy) whether we like them or not. This is a great way to get people to sign on to decisions that they may not actually find substantively attractive.

In the United States in 2000 when George Bush lost the popular vote but won the Electoral College it was difficult for people outside the country to understand. And, difficult as it was for some people inside the United States to accept, the Electoral College was the process that the constitution charged with making this decision and because George Bush emerged from that process most Americans decided that that was a legitimate outcome even though a majority of Americans voted for somebody else. It was a just decision because it emerged from the process. That's a democratic notion of democracy.

A more substantive notion of democracy would hold that democracy is good because it yields good decisions but also because it's good for you. It's good for your soul. It's good for your being. It makes you a better person because it makes you more efficacious. Think again about the Swedes. The Swedes have democracy in places the Americans never think about democracy. The Swedes have democracy in their schools, in their workplaces. They have worker representatives on company boards. They have workplace democracy making decisions about what color to paint the walls in the cafeteria at the workplace. They have democracy much more thoroughly embedded in society than just in the political system because for them it's a much more thoroughgoing substantive thing. It's actually about government deciding this is good for you as opposed just to a process that produces good decisions.

Equality. Finally let's take the value of equality. Equality for the Americans is really a procedural value. It's about equal access and equal opportunity. It's not about equal outcomes. Americans want equal opportunity. They want everybody to be able to get in the game. Throughout our history, of course, we have had rules about who can get in the game and who can't and our history has been a history of different groups saying "Hey, wait a minute. You profess to believe in these procedural values, you profess to let everybody be in the game, have the rules, treat everybody the same, well then let us in."

You've heard about the civil rights movement when African Americans made that argument. You've heard about the Women's Movement when women made that argument. We currently have some battles over civil rights involving gays, involving disabled people, involving other groups that feel that they're excluded from the system and they're saying "Hey let us in. Let the rules treat us the same too." So when I say this about equality I'm not being naïve. Of course in different times in our history we have not allowed everybody in but our creed says we treat everybody the same. That's the kind of equality we have. We have equality before the law. The law is supposed to treat everybody the same; one person, one vote. Nobody gets to vote four times just because they really feel intensely about an issue. We have equal opportunity. We have an educational system that gives most kids an educational

background and then we kind of pat you on the back and say “go to it. Go make something of yourself. You had this opportunity.”

This is not equality of outcome. It is not equality of results. It is not the kind of equality where somebody says this is what the outcome of this process should be and this is how we’re going to get there. Again contrasting to the Swedish system which has a whole lot more equality: more economic equality, more gender equality, etc. Sweden has a lot more equality because the government decided this is what’s good for us now, let’s shape up and get there. Let’s make the policies that will get us to those outcomes. Sweden is still of course a capitalist democratic enlightenment country. So it’s not extreme on any of these things. But for my students it’s a marvellous contrast with the American concept of equality.

In sum, what I just described to you are the kinds of values and the ways of perceiving the values that roughly speaking most Americans would sign on to; those are the ideas that pull us together as Americans.

Liberal and conservative labels are very slippery. They tend to mean different things at different times in our history, so I’m trying to get away from those labels to talk about this in a slightly different way.

Now let me turn to the ideas that “divide” Americans. I think it’s imperative for American students of the current generation who haven’t grown up in a time when they’ve had to fight hard for rights or to see themselves internationally in ways that are illuminating for them. I love my country deeply. I am a deep patriot of America and I am not by any means trying to put it down. The fact that I can see it clearly by no means should indicate in any way, shape or form that I wouldn’t lay down my life for this country.

First of all, the divisions that underline American politics these days are not just “left-right” divisions. They’re not just liberal-conservative divisions. They’re not just Democratic-Republican divisions. And if you understand some of these divisions that split Americans up, it may make a lot more sense to you how American politics works and why George Bush has such a difficult job holding all the Republicans in the country together or why the Democrats have been unable to unify all the Democrats.

All of America’s mainstream political debate takes place [in what would be considered the “right-wing” of a European debate. For Americans,] it’s still procedural guarantees over the social order versus substantive guarantees over the social order. Procedural guarantees over the economy versus substantive guarantees over the economy keeping in mind that even an American who is in favor of substantive guarantees over the economy isn’t close to holding the same views as a member of the British Labor Party for instance or the Swedish Social Democrats.

The great American political debate is an issue that is in some ways mystifying even to Americans. You will often find Americans who by all means look like they ought to be members of the Democratic working class - those who do not make a lot of money, who do not get a big tax cut when George Bush has a tax cut – nevertheless voting for Bush instead of the Democrats who actually appear to work much more for their economic interests.

There’s a book out recently called “What’s the matter with Kansas?” that has gotten a lot of play in the American press. The issue this book is looks at is why Kansas is an increasingly Republican state when Kansas is filled with people who according to an old continuum ought to be Democrats. If the debate were just about economic interests - just about whether these voters want more government assistance, for instance - they should be Democrats and yet they’re not. Perhaps

“quality of life” becomes more important when you resolve some of your more basic needs. Now, I don’t know if this is true. I don’t know if it’s true that we’ve really resolved poverty and I don’t know if it’s true that when you resolve your basic needs the quality of life issues become salient but I do know that quality of life issues are pretty salient for Americans right now. The [question about how much government control] Americans think government should have in our private lives revolves around two different dimensions: one of them is religious. The “matter with Kansas” in the book is that Americans are now voting a lot more on their personal religious beliefs than they are on their pocketbooks. Many might believe that there should be prayer in school, for instance, which is a tricky issue in America because for many years our interpretation of our first amendment that there should be a wall or a barrier between church and state; a belief that we should keep church and state separate for the sake of the state but also and in some ways more importantly for the sake of the church. This has been very controversial throughout our history but the issue of how much religion ought to be brought into our public life is an important political issue right now.

Americans who are very libertarian and who say government should be “out of people’s bedrooms” include traditional Republican Party members. Republicans were almost libertarian in the sense that they just wanted the government to leave them alone. They are the true heirs of John Locke and limited government.

Traditionally, Democrats have favored lots of personal freedom, but they’re willing to allow government to come in and make jobs; they’re willing to allow government to help the poorest people to provide Medicaid - which is our program that helps the poorest Americans get medical care - to provide food stamps and to regulate the economy in ways that don’t make people equal as a substantive outcome but make them less unequal. That’s the traditional position of the Democrats and the Republicans.

There are policies now that are difficult. There are now a lot of people who used to be Democrats but who believe that religion should have a place in public life. These people are socially conservative even though they are economically moderate. Some of these are those people that Michael Morgan was talking about who watch lots of television.<sup>1</sup> They are economically moderate but socially conservative. They do want government to make decisions about their private life. Republicans for years had difficulty because most of these Americans were Democrats.

The Republicans were able to change that calculus when they reached out to these social conservative/substantive decision focused people. It’s tough for Republicans because they don’t actually fit together in a lot of ways. But these voters are willing to vote for lower taxes, for less government intervention in the economy on the condition that the libertarian Republicans provide them with the social policies that they want.

Many Republicans aren’t really socially conservative. George Bush’s wife and his mother are both pro-choice. They are conservative Republican women who are pro-choice and they’re socially liberal in many ways. I’d be very surprised if many of the politicians who’ve come out against gay marriage recently in American politics give a hoot about gay marriage especially the people who are more libertarian. But Republicans can’t win national elections without the socially conservative people so you get a very unusual set of party policies that are designed to satisfy both the people up here who want low taxes and minimum government intervention in the

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<sup>1</sup> See previous chapter on “Media issues” by Prof Michael Morgan.

economy and the people who are willing to live with the low taxes in order to have more government intervention in the social order.

This makes for tricky politics. George Bush's father was unable to keep those interests together. Reagan was great at it. Reagan actually got a lot of people to move over the line from the Democratic side to the Republican side. As a great communicator, he really intuitively understood where people were or weren't able to speak to their values. George Bush senior lost that group of socially conservative people. He lost them because he really is and still is to this day more "old school" Republican. This is the kind of old traditional Republican that just didn't speak naturally to the [socially conservative] groups. He didn't have a natural way of reaching out to them and he lost that vote. He couldn't bring in what we call the "Christian Right" in America. So Clinton beat Bush. When Clinton ran the second time, the Republican nominee was Bob Dole who was also an old school, traditional Republican who had a hard time getting these people on board. So they just didn't vote.

George Bush the son is a dream candidate for the Republican Party. Even though he is an eastern elite like his father he speaks the language of Texas. He speaks the language of down home folks. American pollsters asked a lot of crazy questions during the 2000 campaign, one of which was "Who would you rather have over for a barbecue: Al Gore or George Bush?" and everybody said they would rather have George Bush over. Bush seems more personable to people but George Bush also had a campaign strategist named Carl Rove who I would say is either the most brilliant political strategist that I can remember in my lifetime or he's sure close. He's been active in politics since his days in the young college Republican movement and he really understands a lot about American politics. Rove had a strategy for making a Republican majority and making it last that involves bringing those socially conservative people on board the Republican train and keeping them there.

Time and again political scientists say that to get nominated you have to run to your base of support, after which you go back into the middle because that's where all the voters are. Time and again political scientists have said Bush is going to run back to the middle and then Bush doesn't run back to the middle. Bush keeps out there with his base which is actually two bases if you look carefully: he's got the top corner base and he's got the bottom base. Bush continually speaks to his base and mostly to that Christian right base.

Even when people say he's "shooting himself in the head," he keeps going back to that base. That's Rove's plan. Rove has said as much in the 2004 election when everybody said "Bush is going to run to the center" and Bush still kept talking to his base, taking strong stances against gay marriage, saying he doesn't know whether the evolution evidence is sound, etc.

Bush has also said that he thinks that there should be a limit on stem cell research which is another big issue with the "Christian Right" but an unpopular stance with the majority of Americans. Contrary to expectations in the 2004 election when people thought he would take a more moderate stand, he ran hard to the right. Carl Rove said then that he believed that there were 3 or 4 million "Christian Right" voters who stayed home in 2000 and if he could just get them out in 2004, Bush would be able to win the election on the strength of their support and the support he already had without trying to go for the middle. So far the strategy has been pretty successful.

The thing I think that Rowe has not been able to really entirely manage very well is the issue of Iraq because the popular sentiment has changed on Iraq. Bush is losing a lot of support from his traditional bases and that's a problem for him. He's

got a core base of probably 30%, 35% of people who will love him no matter what because either they've gotten the tax cut they wanted or social policy they want. Bush's approval ratings are now hovering around 40%. So he's almost lost his whole "cushion" of support before he gets down to the bottom. That's what politics looks like today in America for the Republicans.

The Democrats have their own set of issues to deal with, and the Democrats have not been blessed with a strategist of similar calibre to call Rove. The Democrats are all over the place.

Traditionally, being a Democrat meant being the working person's friend. The party focused on policies that helped poor people or disadvantaged people. It was a party that reached out in civil rights to African Americans, to women, to Hispanics; it's been a party of minority groups. It has been a party that's really had an electoral dilemma because many of the people who had been the natural supporters of the Democrats - people less advantaged in socio-economic ways or single moms - are also the least likely people to vote. So the Democrats have always had bigger numbers but they had to work harder to get those people to turn out. They've not had the Republican base that tends to be much more homogenous.

Democrats tend to favor a fair amount of personal freedom, but they tend to be pretty united in their belief that the government ought to take a role to alleviate poverty. Democrats are more collectivist than Republicans by and large. They see more collective responsibility for society and maybe a little less procedural focus in the economy. But keep in mind that you still don't see Americans calling for socialized healthcare. You still don't see Americans calling for the kind of full network of social policies that characterize lots of other countries. But Americans have supported a more limited welfare program, Medicaid, etc.

Poorer Americans. You're actually worse off in the United States in some ways if you're not really poor.<sup>2</sup> If you are too poor there's a support system of food stamps, of Medicaid and other policies that will keep you from falling all the way to the bottom. But if you're the working poor, you don't qualify for Medicaid because you make too much money. Since these are a means tested programs, you have to prove you are poor to get them. Some Americans who are not poor enough to get Medicaid, not poor enough to get food stamps and who are employed may actually end up being worse off.

Democrats have tended to be more in favor of social programs. They're in favor for instance of keeping the current social security system in the United States, which is designed for all elderly people. It's a kind of social insurance type program where people make contributions throughout their working life and then they get money back when they retire. It's a guaranteed, collectivist system.

Bush would like to replace it with a system of individual savings accounts where individuals would take some more risk but maybe stand to do a little bit better because they could invest their social security accounts in the stock market. Democrats have been for the more collectivist, traditional solution there. Republicans have been for the reform that is a little bit more procedural. So that's economically where the Democrats have been.

Some issues are divisive for the Democrats. One is the environment. Environmental regulations engender some substantive collectivist approaches; telling of people how to live their life. They involve telling people to recycle. They involve

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<sup>2</sup> Poverty in the U.S. is measured by income. In 2003, approximately 12 percent of the population lived below the poverty threshold of \$18,900 earned per year. Source: 2005 World Almanac.



saying “don’t use too much gas,” saying “change your life.” It’s not deeply substantive but it is less procedural. It’s still government saying “we’ve decided what’s good for you, adjust your behaviour.”

Another divisive issue along this fault line is affirmative action. Affirmative action is fundamentally a substantive policy. It holds that it’s not enough to advocate that the rules treat everybody the same, affirmative action says we would like everybody to be more the same. So we’re going to treat them differently to get them there. It’s fundamentally substantive. That is how I think you find many Americans being strongly opposed or strongly in favor of affirmative action and really not thinking about the race aspects of it all. And that’s not to say that I don’t think there’s any racism in the United States and that affirmative action is a target of that. But there’s another set of issues here that I think are fundamental and they are about this procedural nature of America that is separate from the other kinds of issues. Democrats tend to be more in favor of affirmative action than Republicans and that cuts across race lines.

We did this series of interviews for the textbook.<sup>3</sup> One of the people we interviewed for our civil rights chapter was a man named Ward Connolly. Ward Connolly is a successful African American businessman who lives in California who up until this last year was a member of the California Board of Regents. That means he was one of seventeen people who decided policy for the entire University of California University system – a huge, powerful role in California politics. It’s a very powerful state job that he used to almost single-handedly get the University of California to stop its affirmative action program. As a result, the UC system stopped affirmative action a couple of years ago. Ward Connolly strongly believes that affirmative action does damage to African Americans on a couple of counts, basically by exempting them a policy that applies procedural values for a short time and then sending those people back out into the world after graduation where procedural values do apply and people haven’t been provided with the support they need to be able to be a success in that kind of a world.

These two issues, the environment and affirmative action, for Democrats are pretty difficult because they enable Republicans to drive wedges between Democrats along those kinds of issues - just like Democrats can point their fingers and try to drive wedges between Republicans. These are after all controversial issues that take away your freedom to some extent. Affirmative action is reverse discrimination. Environmentalism is anti-business; it is anti-individual choice. It is government telling you how to live your life. Both sides use the procedural bludgeon against each other to try to say that some of their preferred choices are un-American.

In our politics, small wedge issues have great consequences. Think back to 2000 election, for example. Al Gore would have won handily had he been the only person on the left side of the continuum running in that election. But there was somebody in that bottom left corner named Ralph Nader, who had the support of many people who were far more likely to support the kinds of communal collectivist values of environmentalism, affirmative action or just more community in life more collectivism in life.

Had Nader not been there or had Gore been able to satisfactorily respond to people in these areas so that Nader didn’t get that support - as Kerry was able to do much more successfully in 2004 - then Gore could have been more successful. So

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<sup>3</sup> “Keeping the Republic” by Barbour Wright and Wolf, distributed to American Studies participants as part of their mini American Studies libraries.

people on the left and the right have got to juggle this social continuum that changes the old dimensions of American politics. It's not enough as you pointed out liberal conservative left right not enough anymore.

There's now another dimension that makes it really difficult to make simple generalizations about American politics. The older I get the more conservative I get economically in a sense that I'm starting to think markets can do more than I thought they could when I was living in Sweden as a graduate student. I am pretty socially liberal meaning that I really believe that laws should govern your stance on personal issues like gay marriage, etc. But I straddle the line economically. That doesn't mean I haven't favored more government intervention in the economy and it doesn't mean that I don't think there's some pretty darn good ideas offered by some people in the Republicans.

The war in Iraq is a hugely divisive issue in American politics right now and for the life of me I have a lot of trouble seeing where it goes in the political continuum. I mean, this is basically government saying "we know what's right not just for the country but for the world" and we are going to make a substantive decision regarding it.

It leads into one other issue that I think we need to talk about when we talk about the ideas that divide Americans: national security. Since 9/11 Americans' views of freedom have undergone some change much to my libertarian dismay. The other day Michael Morgan offered you an argument that Americans who watch a lot of TV are very fearful and the more insecure they become the more they are willing to sign on to socially conservative policies that limit freedom. His argument is that it's watching TV that causes that to happen. I think it's entirely likely that advertisers know that the bulk of Americans feel that way and they tailor shows and advertising to those people. I sense that Americans are afraid and thus are willing to tolerate infringements on their freedom which is to say a bigger government roll. What do I mean by infringements on more freedom? I mean more government surveillance, more government limitations on individual action, tighter controls on what we are allowed to say. In the days immediately after 9/11 an American comedian was talking about the attacks on the World Trade Center, and he said "you know, people are talking about the cowardly nature of these terrorists. He said I don't think that that's so cowardly. Say what you want about it. Cruise missiles from 2000 miles away –that's cowardly. Staying on the plane when it hits the building – that's not cowardly."

Whatever you think about his comments, he lost his job. In the land of the free and the home of the brave he lost his job for saying that and the next day the President's press secretary said in these times people need to be very careful of what they say. Now the White House kind of smoothed over that but I think that the very fact that that incident could happen is worrisome. Even though ABC didn't just directly tell him not to say things like that, advertisers did. They feared that, since we're sponsoring the show, people will think that we think that these were brave terrorists and they won't buy their product. So they threatened to pull out if ABC didn't fire him. That entire exchange would have been very surprising in America before 9/11. Most Americans would have objected to the firing as a limit on freedom of speech, freedom of the press.

We've always been a little more likely not to endorse our specific freedoms when they are specific. If you ask Americans if they support freedom of speech they answer yes. If you ask Americans if they support freedom of the press they say yes. If

you ask Americans if they think the Ku Klux Klan<sup>4</sup> should be allowed to march in their town they say no. You know we respect the principle but we don't always respect the application of it. 9/11 made that a little more immediate and a little more graphic.

Recently, controversial legislation called the Patriot Act passed Congress. This Act lays out provisions that are supposed to protect us from terrorist activity by providing for surveillance basically on the suspicion of terrorism. The Act undoes a lot of the procedural guarantees our legal system has given us over the years.<sup>5</sup>

Americans following 9/11 are scared. I don't think it's caused by television as much as I think it's caused by the fact that 9/11 hit America on her own shores for the first time in people's conception. This was an unheard of thing for Americans, who had always felt pretty safe. Our government didn't know how to respond immediately; they had no blueprint for this.

We are conscious of racial profiling problems against Moslem Americans and yet our willingness to reduce our own freedoms, and our willingness to be less tolerant of other people increases with fear. I don't think it's fear necessarily caused by television but by a number of things. The threat level stuff for a while was pretty pervasive and they stopped doing it when somebody pointed out that the threat levels seemed to go up right before Bush needed more approval for something. Often presidential approval is a proxy for how we feel about our country.

The day after 9/11 everybody loved George Bush. I mean his approval ratings went through the ceiling before he had done anything. Before he went out there with the bullhorn and really rallied Americans and did what he actually did very well. Before he did that people were saying "I approve of the President because I love my country. He's my proxy" and when the threat levels would go up people would say "I approve of George Bush."

### **Reflection by Mr. Chris Maroleng**

**MR MAROLENG:** My name is Chris Maroleng and I am a senior researcher at the Institute for Security Studies, an applied policy research think tank.

I'd like to base what I have to say not just on Professor Barbour's presentation, but also on the political culture of Southern Africa generally. Let's see how our own political culture holds up when contrasted with American political culture.

Professor Barbour described American political culture as procedural, individualistic, democratic; a culture that embraces freedom, quality, justice but also one that defines itself in individualistic terms. Our political culture in Southern Africa similarly espouses the concepts of democracy, freedom, equality, and justice. But ours is very much substantive and collectivist, reflecting our own political legacies that inform our political culture today.

African tradition plays a key role in our culture. There is, for example, the concept of ubuntu, or "umuntu umuntu nabantu" which holds that a person is only a person through his interactedness with the greater whole. The concept of the

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<sup>4</sup> An American terrorist, racist group that reached its zenith after the Civil War. The Supreme Court allowed the KKK to march through a Jewish neighborhood outside Chicago as a fundamental right to freedom of speech.

<sup>5</sup> For a full, balanced treatment of the controversial provisions of the Act, see Slate Magazine online.

individual falls away, yielding to the collective. Look at the preamble of our constitution where ubuntu appears<sup>6</sup> as the underlined ideology that will inform political culture and practice here.

Professor Barbour used a very complicated but insightful matrix to explain political culture in the United States. In fact, it's so complicated that I wonder if a lot of Americans actually understand their own political culture. It is clearly a culture that due to the various evolutionary processes that have formed it has resulted in a very dynamic and very conservative political culture. We in South Africa can learn a lot from it.

Let us first take a step back and reflect on the historical evolution of our African culture. Ours is defined in Southern African countries by the liberation struggles against colonialism. Botswana is an exception in the sense that they didn't have a protracted liberation struggle. One might actually argue whether Botswana is a success story mainly because it didn't have a liberation struggle.

As positive as our nationalist struggle for liberation was in establishing the concept of freedom, equality, justice, and democracy, it also produced some negatively reinforcing ideologies like nationalism in the social movement context which was fought by a wide range of activists.

The nationalist movement may account for some of the anti-revolutionary or revisionist stances that ruling parties have taken. Here I'd look at the case of Zimbabwe, Swapo in Namibia and at the MPLA in Angola.

African nationalism seen as a social movement was intolerant of diversity either internally or externally and as a movement was both sweeping in what it claimed and annihilatory in what it rejected. President Robert Mugabe gives an example of this tendency. Professor Mugabe, before Zimbabwe's independence said the following: "Our votes must go together with our guns. After all, any vote we shall have shall have been the product of the gun. The gun which produces the vote should remain its security officer; it's guarantor. The people's vote and the people's guns are always inseparable twins." In the national liberation struggle, therefore, "the gun" is the guarantor, not "the vote," unlike in the United States where people make choices in a democratic process through the ballot box. The liberation struggle taught us that basically it is political violence that will be the ultimate guarantor of what political culture should be. We must begin to question this discourse.

Perhaps there was also something inherent in nationalism itself even before the war - and the adoption of socialism - which gave rise to authoritarianism. Maybe nationalism's emphasis on unity on all cost; its subordination of trade unions, churches, and other African organizations to its imperatives gave rise to an intolerance of pluralism. Maybe nationalism's glorification of the leader gave rise to a postcolonial cult of personalities. Maybe nationalism's commitment to modernization whether socialist or not inevitably implied a command state. Indeed the postcolonial state and authoritarianism cannot be explained only on the basis of its being a successor to an equally authoritarian settler colonial state. Rather, the legacy of African nationalism itself tainted a postcolonial state with authoritarian tendencies.

Viewing the liberation struggle as the single influence on political culture is also wrong. There are other aspects of Southern African political culture that were just as authoritarian and undemocratic. Simply put, there were four main periods of influence: pre-colonial, colonial, the armed liberation struggle and of course some of the current practices of the post colonial elites.

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<sup>6</sup> That is, the South African Constitution.

In pre-colonial societies, politics was “non-competitive.” In fact, competition was viewed as illegitimate and those who tried to compete against the dominant forces were simply marginalized, eliminated or assimilated. For example, look at the Zulu imperial political culture which was basically assimilated, annihilated or basically eliminated.

When the Ndebele moved to southern Zimbabwe, for another example, they found individuals there but because they had come from Nguni or Zulu ideology, the Ndebele carried out the same sort of non competitive politics, resembling colonialism.

Colonialism made no pretence of being democratic at all. It was quite clear by its definition and design that it was an autocratic system of governance, undemocratic to the core. Political participation was severely limited and no political competition was allowed or tolerated between Africans and the white race.

Pre-colonialism and colonialism were formative. Now we must turn to the liberation struggle period. The nationalist liberation struggle in many states in Southern Africa created expectations that every African would embrace the liberation war, generated an institutionalised culture of fear, conformity and unquestioning support. A lot of our guerrilla movements and nationalist parties were never democratically structured and did not operate in a democratic fashion. They were highly authoritarian and those who opposed them were dealt with quite severely.

In the current period - the postcolonial state in Africa - we must study all these historical aspects that have influenced our political culture. As much as our counterparts in the United States can do so, I think its important that more scholars must begin to question what it is about our political culture that makes it difficult for us to have truly democratic systems even though we have embraced to a large degree multi party systems.

Why is it that so many of our states in Southern Africa have not embraced democratic open political competition? I think there's a deep-seated ideology here on the role of organizations like the Southern African Development Community who in my opinion have not met the challenges of the State that can only be understood in the context of the days of the frontline states. Why were the frontline states the predecessor organization which formed or resulted in the creation of the Southern African Development Community? What formed the ideology or political culture behind it? A lot of the states in Southern Africa were concerned about liberating our part of Africa from colonial rule and on keeping the apartheid regime in South Africa out of the rest of Southern Africa. So one could argue that the Southern African Development Community was a security paradigm not one of economic integration. In this instance, political culture actually influences the Southern African Development Community.

The greatest ideological battle of political culture in Southern Africa is the clash between the ideology of regime security versus the ideology of human security. Regime security refers to the ideology of “political participation based on the furtherance of political domination of these former nationalist liberation movements” which is contrasted with an ideology of human security based on ensuring that the security of individuals comes or is of more importance than the security of regimes in Southern Africa.

In global security terms, there is another very security conscious ideology of the Cold War and post-cold war periods, where security is defined through strongly national interested and highly militaristic terms as indicated by say intervention pre-emptively by the United States on countries like Iraq and possibly others who pose a security threat. If what Professor Barbour described as the political culture that

informs American society applies only to Americans and doesn't apply to other states who the United States may or may not engage with, we will be stuck when this concept is taken further by other countries, simply reinforcing the state of politics in the international sphere.

### **Question and answer period**

QUESTION: Where on the continuum would you place a country that has just come out of civil war or repression?

PROF BARBOUR: Well, I think that would depend on the answers to specific questions about what kind of government it wants to have. I mean if you go back to the founding lecture I gave you about the United States which was a government that just come out of revolution we had to decide how strong a government we wanted. It depends on how you answer those questions. There is no natural place you land automatically. I think the thing about politics is that politics is always about choices and every rule you choose has certain kind of outcomes and different people are going to win and different people are going to lose depending on the rules you choose.

The United States has chosen a particular set of rules that does support one particular set of winners and losers. It doesn't mean that these losers always lose but it means that they tend to go that way. Every other country has to make the same decisions about those institutions and that will locate them somewhere on the grid.

QUESTION: You referred to the concept of Ubuntu. Does ubuntu apply horizontally or does it apply vertically as well? In "operation clean up" in Zimbabwe, was there a concept of Ubuntu there in that situation?

MR. MAROLENG: If you remember, I said there seem to be two ideologies that are fighting for dominance in Southern Africa - regime security versus human security. When you talk of Ubuntu, it's really a human security concept; one that says that the good of the greater part is more important than the individual. Even though Operation Restore Order was touted as an attempt to carry out urban renewal of informal settlements and of the informal economy in Zimbabwe, it was clearly targeting the bastions of opposition support in that country. Therefore, the concept of Ubuntu in this instance falls away quite simply because it is based on the security of an elite or individuals and not on the overall benefit of the community. So in that sense I'll say that it wasn't Ubuntu.

QUESTION: Chris, in your reflection you alluded to the fact that most Southern African states although they are democratic they do not embrace democracy fully. You listed the historical aspects which have now shaped the current political culture. And you indicated that the South African government is more substantive and less procedural. You seemed comfortable with that - that is, when you indicated that the South African government is more substantive and less procedural. Now is this just rhetoric? Your comment.

MR MAROLENG: In the matrix that Professor Barbour provided, my argument was that Southern Africa is substantive in the sense that it embraces a more social orientation. I did this to justify the concept of ubuntu as the operational vehicle that ideally should drive the way our political culture should be oriented. I do not reject the fact that there are procedural aspects which we do embrace quite significantly and that form an important part of our political culture.

QUESTION: My question goes to Professor Barbour: How important is it to know that American democracy stems from a long historical process? Is there any hope in exporting democracy to nations with only short liberation history?

PROF BARBOUR: I think clearly the United States system is one that's evolved over a long time and one that evolved out of a particular philosophical background. I don't think you can just plonk democratic institutions down on people who have no democratic tradition. Democracy doesn't come naturally. I don't think it comes instinctively and I think it's hard work to become a democratic citizen.

The American people don't necessarily do a very good job of staying democratic citizens all the time and they have a long history of it. So I think that history has a huge amount to do with where through a process of cultural evolution.

QUESTION: Professor Barbour, you spoke extensively on how the Democratic Party advocates in favor of the environment. How split are Republicans on the Kyoto protocol, given the impact on global warming and all these events that we've had in the last few months?<sup>7</sup>

PROF BARBOUR: I didn't mean to make it sound that only the Democrats care about the environment. When Bush first came into office he appointed a woman named Christie Todd-Whitman as the head of the Environmental Protection Agency; the government agency that deals with environmental policy. Christie Todd-Whitman was a former Governor of New Jersey and her political stance is as a moderate Republican. She grew up in a time when Republicans actually had taken more of a social stance. They were called Rockefeller Republicans. She's just recently written a book called "It's my party too" about the feeling that she has about being forced out of the administration by the more socially conservative branch of the Republican Party. The issue of global warming I think is a really interesting case. Science isn't perfect, but there's some pretty strong evidence about global warming. Bush says the evidence is not solid and conclusive.<sup>8</sup> I think that is a political shading of that statement that is more fitted to this administration's perspective which is a pro-business not terribly environmentally friendly perspective. Coincidentally, though, I saw a headline in the New York Times the other day stating that Bush is advising people to drive less and use less gas.

QUESTION: What about the role of nationalism in our present political culture? Some have argued that there is a difference between state nationalism and popular movement nationalism. They say that whenever post-colonial states take power they tend to eradicate social movements, completely squash them, take over politics completely at the state level, institute very strong party systems and produce a type of state nationalism completely different and sometimes completely unrelated to popular nationalism. That is like Zimbabwe right now.

MR MAROLENG: Hundred percent exactly. I think Mandani's book "Citizens and Subjects" exactly takes on the whole question of nationalism. I can't add to what you've said.

QUESTION: In terms of deriving and building political culture within Southern Africa, I find it very difficult to speak about human security when we still have this constant focus on regime security by elites. So I think we need to focus on ways in which we can move Southern Africa away from this elite driven regime security so that we can start to then really start talking about human security.

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<sup>7</sup> Reference to hurricane Katrina that struck New Orleans causing considerable damage and loss of life just months before the American Institute was held.

<sup>8</sup> Ed. Note; Bush Administration policy centers on the impact that human activity has had on the Earth's temperature increase; not on the issue of the temperature increase itself.

MR MAROLENG: One of the reasons elites react this way is because they suffer from what I call an “elite insecurity dilemma.” Elites think they will be the sacrificial lambs on the alter of democracy and therefore democracy as espoused by the West becomes a thing to be fought. In Zimbabwe I’ve argued that it is a Zulu sum game theory. It’s Zulu sum theory.

QUESTION: My question is to Chris again. Is it significant in this light that the ANC still refers to itself as a liberation movement and not a political party?

MR MAROLENG: It’s a very interesting question and one book that you might want to read that might help us here is Gumede’s “The Battle for the Soul of the ANC.” It’s very interesting in the South African context because it suggests we could be yet again falling into a trap where all politics falls within a nationalist liberation movement.